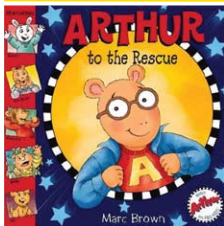


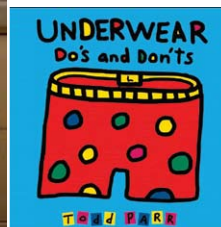
WANT TO MEET YOUR FAVORITE AUTHOR?



TODD PARR



KATHERINE PATERSON



"Talk to fellow teachers, librarians, administrators, and booksellers," says Alexis O'Neill, author of *The Recess Queen* and the article "The Truth About School Visits." She also suggests talking to parent leaders at other schools and making a list of authors they have seen in action doing outstanding presentations. "Look for authors with terrific books that relate to your curriculum goals too," she says.

Budget-wise, scan your state awards lists for quality local authors. Authors beyond a certain geographical distance require that their transportation, hotel, and meal costs are covered. Some publishers' Web sites list their school-visiting authors by region. You might be surprised to see who lives right around the corner.

2 VISITING DAY

What happens during a visit is largely dictated by your school's needs. Many authors have several choices of programs and will tailor their visit to what works best for the school. If reading interest is down, an animated reading with opportunities for the children to participate can offer a boost. If there is high interest in the writing process or artistic aspect of children's books, hands-on workshops can be combined with a larger assembly-style discussion about becoming an author or illustrator.

"As an illustrator, I have a natural advantage to make school visits visually appealing and lots of fun," says Elizabeth Dulemba, who in the coming year will add six more titles to her current crop of three picture books. "I'm a bit of a ham and love to get kids involved while I read the stories and create an illustration from one of my books," she says. "I often teach younger kids how to draw characters by using simple shapes. Older kids and adults enjoy learning about my digital illustration technique through my slide show and the multitude of working examples I share." She adds, "Speaking at schools is a natural extension of what I love about picture books."

Here's how to plan a memorable and successful visit from an inspirational children's author. By Sascha Zuger

Daniel Pinkwater is a beloved author of more than 100 children's books and a popular NPR commentator. But he met his most memorable audience on an elementary school visit. "When we pulled into the parking lot," says Pinkwater, "a bunch of fifth graders with horns piled out the front door. A brass choir! The kids played a fanfare as we made our way into the building!"

As if all that wasn't enough, Pinkwater was escorted to the playground, where the kids introduced him to a red hen they had trained to do tricks, using the very techniques described in his book *The Hoboken Chicken Emergency*.

"The librarian and the teachers had done an incredible job," says Pinkwater. "My appearance was just the cherry on top of an amazing series of lessons,

exercises, projects, and reading, reading, reading. Now, *that* is what I call a school visit."

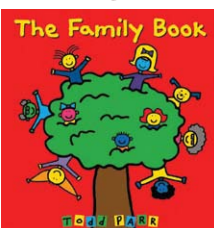
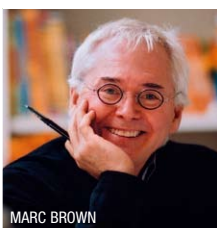
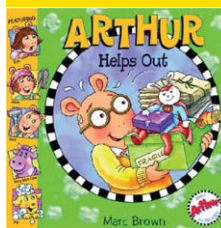
While training chickens is not mandatory to ensure a successful author visit, learning the best planning strategies for super author visits can make the prospect less daunting and guarantee your school gets the most bang for its buck.

1 CHOOSING YOUR AUTHOR

Perhaps the most intimidating aspect of planning the event is picking the author you'd like to visit your school. With so many talented authors offering visits, it can be a tough choice. School librarians can be great resources since they are on the front line and know the authors that excite students. Many authors have their school visit program descriptions and fees listed on their Web sites for easy preliminary research.

“Seeing a real author in person made me believe it was possible.”

— Jordan Sonnenblick, children's author



Authors with multiple nonfiction titles are often willing to showcase different books during their visit to provide a good match for the current math, science, or history curriculum.

“I have books about foods, sounds, work done by animals, and a book about the rainforest,” says nonfiction author Nancy Allen. “With each book, I provide extensive classroom activities for the teachers that meet the national standards,” she says. “Since my books cross the curriculum subject-wise, the students are exposed to a variety of literature.” Allen says her goal is to stimulate students’ creativity and imagination to ultimately enhance writing skills.

3 GO BIG OR STAY SMALL?

Planning the location of the presentation involves more thought than simple logistics. Some authors are very comfortable speaking to large assemblies and can handle the challenges an auditorium or gym venue might present. Others prefer smaller classroom spaces.

“I use my background as former Arizona Teacher of the Year and member of the All-USA Teacher Team to capture kids’ attention, create an interactive program, and inbed reading/writing standards into my presentations,” says author Terri Fields. “I taught public speaking, so I’m used to working with hundreds of students. But I strongly prefer more interactive sessions to large assemblies.”

One thing to consider when breaking students into groups is to avoid varying the ages too much; otherwise the author may find it difficult to capture the attention of the group. What interests a kindergartner might not appeal to a third grader. In order to reach the most students, an author who writes for a wide range of readers might feature different books for different grades.

4 MANAGING THE COST

If funds are an issue, consider teaming with other schools in the area to split transportation costs. Some authors will even split their full-day rate between two nearby schools. Many have a limited number of pro bono or discounted visits available per year for schools that lack access to funds.

To make your planning simple, you can select a booking agent who will handle all the details. Some publishers offer this service, such as Scholastic’s Invite an Author program. An independent booking service, Balkin Buddies, both allows interested schools to consider authors based on region and grade level, and includes a listing of when authors are already booked in your area (which cuts down on travel expenses).

Early planning can give you the option of filing for grants or donations to defer the cost of the visit or to acquire books the students can keep. “Talk with your PTA about donating Tax Credit monies. As few as 10 donations

may be enough to obtain a book for every single student,” suggests Fields. “Contact Wells Fargo about their teacher grant money. There is a very short paragraph to complete in which you can ask for up to \$500. Talk to your Title I director and see if the books qualify for Title I money.”

When all else fails financially, allow authors to do what they do best: Get creative. Consider a video visit or teleconference call. Alternatively, look online for video interviews with the authors you love.

5 MAKING THE VISIT LAST

Ideally, students can come away from the author visit with a tangible piece to remember the experience, such as individual copies of an author’s book.

If books can’t be offered for all students, place one book in each classroom and several copies in the library. This allows all students to become familiar with the author’s work. Teachers can read the whole book, the synopsis, or a few chapters of longer books in class.

Some authors send a prep-pack, which includes related reading lists, activity sheets, and discussion leads or lessons. These materials help build excitement and ensure students feel the impact of the visit even after the author has departed.

6 MEETING A REAL-LIFE AUTHOR

Making a personal connection to an author not only excites kids about reading, but it also encourages them to pursue their biggest goals in life. “My high school creative writing teacher was Frank McCourt, author of *Angela’s Ashes*,” says Jordan Sonnenblick, award-winning author of *Zen and the Art of Faking It*. “I always knew I wanted to write books that really moved people, but seeing a real person achieve that made me believe it was possible.”

“It would be amazing if twenty years from now, some newly published novelist came up and thanked me for something I said on a school visit in 2008,” says Sonnenblick.

Look for Authors Here!

A good way to begin your exploration is to search the Internet for your favorite author's personal Web site or the publisher's. If you prefer one-stop shopping, try these resources.

● AUTHORS IN SCHOOLS

Find more than 40 authors, illustrators, and entertainers, each with a bio page including testimonials and fees. Search by name, location, or genre.
www.authorsinschools.com

● THE CHILDREN'S BOOK COUNCIL

The Web site hosts a comprehensive list of publishers who offer author visits, along with links and contact information.
www.cbcbooks.org/contacts

● SCHOLASTIC.COM

Search for your favorite children's author by name or location, schedule a visit, and buy books online. You can also find tips for a successful author visit and for managing the expenses.
<http://teacher.scholastic.com/authorsandbooks/visitkit>

● HARPERCOLLINS

Dare to visit the home of Lemony Snicket? The site offers a downloadable author list, advice, and an online request form.
www.harpercollinschildrens.com

● RANDOM HOUSE

The home of 2007 Newbery honorees Kirby Larson and Jennifer L. Holm has a list of available authors and contact information.
www.randomhouse.com/teachers/authors/appear.html

● PENGUIN

Penguin has a detailed guide for planning an author visit. Download it at
<http://us.penguingroup.com>

● HARCOURT BOOKS

Search for authors by name and state, and request a visit online.
www.harcourtbooks.com/authillustrator